



Statement

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) <http://southwest.fws.gov>

Statement Regarding Issuance of Littering Citation at Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge

Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge manages 117,000 acres of land set aside for wildlife along Arizona's southeastern border with the Country of Mexico. The Refuge has seen a steady increase in illegal immigrant traffic over the years. Responding to humanitarian needs of immigrants while also protecting a fragile desert ecosystem is an ongoing challenge for the Refuge.

On February 22, 2008 a Refuge Law Enforcement Officer issued a littering citation to a member of the public. The citation was issued for purposefully leaving plastic jugs filled with water on the Refuge. We asked the person to stop stashing jugs as the Refuge already has emergency water stations.

The individual cited was attempting to place water in the desert for immigrants who cross refuge lands. His motivations are admirable. Unfortunately, depositing plastic jugs contributes to the overwhelming amount of trash already being left on the Refuge. Travelers in need already have a source of water at the Refuge. There are marked 65-gallon mobile water stations and an emergency rescue call button – anyone can press the call button and receive help from Border Patrol.

While primarily a wildlife conservation agency, we are always concerned with human life. Some immigrants have died while attempting to cross the treacherous Arizona desert and many others have been rescued with severe cases of dehydration.

Refuge staff have strongly pursued many efforts to address these problems. We have implemented measures that help save lives of those in need while also remaining consistent with our conservation mission. This has included issuing an official permit to the *Humane Borders* organization to place and maintain 65-gallon mobile water stations. Additionally, we worked with Customs and Border Protection to install solar-powered emergency rescue beacons that provide a direct line to CBP in the unfortunate event that someone's life is in danger. Both of these tools were placed along trails known to be used by immigrants and have saved lives.

Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge's placement along the international border with Mexico within the Altar Valley of southern Arizona provides a unique opportunity to protect remnants of a fragile desert ecosystem and to provide refuge for some of the regions most imperiled species of plants and wildlife. Since its establishment, refuge staff have diligently worked to protect species such as the masked bobwhite quail and the pronghorn, as well as to offer meaningful public recreation opportunities.

However, over the past decade an increasing amount of time and energy has been required to address the growing concern of immigrants entering the U.S. along refuge lands. Since 1998 immigrant traffic has significantly increased as has resulting border enforcement activities by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents. This increase in immigrant traffic has resulted in the creation of illegal trails and significant soil erosion. Tons of trash and abandoned vehicles now litter parts of the refuge. Further, due to an increase in violence along the border and out of concern for the safety of refuge staff and visiting members of the public, 3500 acres of refuge land are closed to public access.

We will continue to provide assistance to those in need while also remaining committed to our conservation mission.